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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000150

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL/PHD, DRL/CRA

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SUBJECT: SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY: THE U.S.

RECORD - BURMA

REF: STATE 333953

BEGIN TEXT: Burma continues to be ruled by a highly authoritarian military regime that reinforces its firm grip with a pervasive security apparatus. The Government's extremely poor human rights record worsens and it continues to commit numerous serious abuses. Citizens still do not have the right to change their government. Security forces continue to commit extrajudicial killings and rape, forcibly relocate persons, use forced labor, conscript child soldiers, and has reestablished forced conscription of the civilian population into militia units. During the year, government-affiliated agents may have killed possibly as many as 70 pro-democracy activists. Disappearances continued, and members of the security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners and detainees.

The United States, human rights and democracy strategy for Burma advocates respect for human rights and rapid political change. We work with like-minded countries to maintain maximum international pressure on Burma, pending reform. That pressure includes a new prohibition on financial services, a new import ban, increased travel sanctions, and continued investment sanctions; the denial of any form of aid, with the exceptions of humanitarian assistance and support for democratic movements; continued public criticism of the Burmese regime; and public diplomacy programs focused on democratic values, human rights, and good governance. It also includes support for international efforts to foster change in Burma, through the missions of UN Special Envoy Razali and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Pinheiro, as well as the efforts of the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other international organizations.

The United States, in coordination with the European Union (EU) and other states, has imposed numerous sanctions on Burma. These U.S. sanctions include a ban on all financial services to Burma; a ban on all imports from Burma; an arms embargo; a ban on all new U.S. investment in Burma; the suspension of all bilateral aid, including counternarcotics assistance; the withdrawal of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) privileges; the denial of Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and EXIMBANK programs; visa restrictions on Burma's senior government officials; and opposition to all new lending or grant programs by the international financial institutions. And since 1990, we have maintained our representation in Burma at the Chargé d'Affaires level.

Burma continues to be hostile to all forms of political opposition. The Government cracked down severely on the main opposition party in May 2003, killing possibly as many as 70 democracy supporters, and shuttering all 300 opposition party offices in Burma. The U.S. encourages UN efforts to free the approximately 150 incarcerated on May 30, as well as the pre-existing 1,300 political prisoners in Burma. During travels throughout Burma, U.S. officials have also personally interviewed victims of political violence and facilitated access for other such U.S. investigations into human rights abuses. Furthermore, the USG maintains frequent contacts with influential members of the political opposition regarding initiatives that will affect the struggle for democracy in Burma.

The U.S. Government promotes the rule of law and democracy by providing information exchange and civic education programs on human rights, democratic values, and governance issues. In 2003, the U.S. dedicated over \$200,000 to speaker programs, exchange programs, publications, and other information outreach. Furthermore, the USG's direct teaching program offers tuition waivers worth \$9,555 to 35 students denied the opportunity to study because of their political beliefs. In addition, we provided \$4.0 million in support of the Burmese democratic opposition in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002. These funds are programmed through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and others and focus on democracy and capacity-building activities and on the collection and dissemination of information on democracy and human rights.

The U.S. urged the Burmese regime, which does not allow domestic human rights groups to function independently and is hostile to outside scrutiny of its human rights record, to

accept visits by international human rights organizations.
Amnesty International completed its second visit to Burma in
2003.

The U.S. has co-sponsored annual resolutions at the UN General Assembly and the UN Commission on Human Rights that highlight and draw international attention to the continued human rights violations in Burma. The 2003 UNGA resolution adopted by consensus calls for an independent investigation of the May 2003 attack on the democratic opposition.

The U.S. continued to encourage the GOB to allow workers' rights and unions and to discontinue its use of forced labor. We support the continuation of a liaison office of the ILO in Burma which made efforts to bring the Government into compliance with its international labor obligations.

The U.S. approved \$104,000 in FY04 funding for a trafficking in persons program to raise awareness among Burmese vulnerable to Burma-to-Thailand trafficking, and to support anti-trafficking efforts of local NGOs. END TEXT.
Martinez